

# critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## New York Opening This Week

Night Music-ANTA Playhouse, 4/8/51. Equity Library Theatre production of Clifford Odets' play featuring Bette Grayson, Leonard Barry, Rod Steiger and Michael Lewis. Directed by Peter Kass, produced by Mr. Barry. Limited run ANTA subscription series.

## Digests of Current Reviews -- more on back page

The King and I-St. James, 3/29/51. Five news magazine and trade journal reviewers joined critical bandwagon started by their daily colleagues. Time, Newsweek, Cue, Variety and Billboard appraisers lavished adjectives on all elements of the new Rodgers and Hammerstein opus. General feeling was that while score and songs weren't up to best of R & H, it was still better than most could do. Sets by Jo Mielziner, costumes by Irene Sharaff shared top honors. Large cast headed by Gertrude Lawrence, Yul Brynner, Doretta Morrow and Dorothy Sarnoff continued to be applauded by all. Hobe, Variety, admitted that Miss Lawrence turned in a perfect performance, though he didn't believe she was ideally cast. Variety critic also noted that out of town critics were premature in writing that Brynner stole the show. Only reservation placed on recommending show to every kind of playgoer by Lardner, New Yorker, was a slight fear that some may complain that the cockles of their hearts were overheated. Director John van Druten was saluted for his first musical production job. Jerome Robbins staging of dancers pleased just about everybody.

The School for Wives-ANTA Playhouse, 3/18/51-4/3/51. Diverse views on values of translations while watching the Louis Jouvet company run through the 17th century Moliere comedy in French were discussed by three weekly reviewers. After complimenting the star and the entire production, McDonald, Billboard, admitted that a playgoer with only limited French could find the ANTA sponsored presentation only mildly amusing. A good translation in lap would do wonders in appreciating the script, he suggested. Lardner, New Yorker, thought the tricky French couplets made the production impossible for playgoers in this town, in this century, to understand, no matter how good their French. Read the book and stay at home was his advice. While Bron, Variety, found that even with a translation at hand, the script was too boring to provide a full evening's entertainment. Gabriel, Cue, who knows his French, enjoyed the entire proceedings. But he suggested that Jouvet would do better producing modern French plays like Giradoux. The Christian Berard settings were the most creative aspect to Glurman, New Republic. Director-critic condemned acting and direction for not developing Moliere's main theme.

Romeo and Juliet-Broadhurst, 3/10/51. Reaction of Glurman to entire production of Shakespeare revival starring Olivia De Havilland was so slight, that it didn't even bore him. For a play to come alive it must have some sort of face, this one simply didn't have any. It is basically a stock production. Might be captivating for some one who has never seen the play.

## Editorial Pros and Cons

Producers like to do things the hard way. There can be no other reason why no play openings are scheduled for two weeks, while the third week promises five opening nights. Playgoers and critics have complained about this unwise practice for years. Box office receipts prove that a weak show has a chance of catching on if there isn't too much new play competition. The League of New York Theatres, which has scant success regulating opening night dates, should evolve a workable solution that will spread the opening nights more evenly throughout the year.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '  
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|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times             | 11. Women's Wear Daily  | 21. Freeman         |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune    | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News              | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror            | 14. George Jean Nathan  | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass           | 15. Ward Morehouse      | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post              | 16. Morning Telegraph   | 26. Newsweek        |
| 7. NY Journal American  | 17. Variety             | 27. Time            |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard           | 28. Nation          |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle       | 19. Theatre Arts        | 29. New Republic    |
| 10. Newark News         | 20. New Leader          | 30. New Yorker      |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

- AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30.  
Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.
- THE AUTUMN GARDEN-Coronet, 3/7/51. Pro: 2-3-7-8-9-13-16-23-26-27-28-30.  
Con: 1-4-5-6-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-20-24.
- BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 23 votes.  
Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-22.
- BILLY BUDD-Biltmore, 2/10/51. Pro: 1-6-8-9-10-13-17-23-24-25-26-27-28-29.  
Con: 2-3-4-5-7-11-12-18-20-22-30.
- CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29.  
So-So: 3. None: 16-21.
- THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30. None: 21.
- DARKNESS AT NOON-Royale, 1/13/51. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 1-14-17-19-22-24-26-29.  
So-So: 5-13-23. None: 25-28.
- GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-28.  
So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.
- THE GREEN PASTURES-Broadway, 3/15/51. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-23-26-27-28-30.
- GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 29 votes. Con: 28.
- THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.  
None: 10-21.
- KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29. None: 21-28.
- THE MOON IS BLUE-Miller, 3/8/51. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 14. None: 19-21-24-25-29.
- OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-23-29-30. So-So: 2.  
Con: 1-3-9-12-17-18-19-20-21-22-24-26-27.
- ROMEO AND JULIET-Broadhurst, 3/10/51. Pro: 1-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-13-18-23-26-30.  
Con: 2-3-5-9-14-15-16-17-20-22-27-28.
- THE ROSE TATTOO-Martin Beck, 2/3/51. Pro: 17 votes. Con: 4-6-7-14-21-24-25-27.  
So-So: 8. None: 12-19-20-22.
- SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28.  
So-So: 10. None: 7-13-15-16-21.
- SECOND THRESHOLD-Morosco, 1/2/51. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 4-9-13-14-17-18-20-23-27-28.  
None: 15-21-24-29.
- SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30.  
Con: 27. So-So: 23.
- SPRINGTIME FOR HENRY-Booth, 3/14/51. Pro: 2-3-4-5-10-12-17-18. Con: 6-7-11-14-15-23-27-28-30. So-So: 1-8.
- TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-24-28. None: 4-12-14-16-21-
- THE KING AND I-St. James, 3/29/51. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11. 25.

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' Green Room Department '  
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CRITICS ABROAD...British Critics Circle, which doesn't give annual awards, heard theatre people's views on criticism at annual luncheon. Importance of encouragement to beginners was emphasized by John Clements. A mere mention means all the world to a young performer. Margaret Leighton, who confessed that the critics supply her with almost all of her reading matter, admitted she had critic-fright at meeting the writers in person.

...AND HERE...Darkness At Noon, Guys and Dolls and The Lady's Not For Burning won NY Drama Critics Circle Awards. Musical and foreign play won easily, while Kingsley's American play had plurality of ten votes. Runners-up were Billy Budd with eight, The Rose Tattoo and The Autumn Garden with three each; while The Country Girl rated only one vote.

AWARD IDEAS...Springtime Folly would have walked away with "Worst Play of the Year" award, predicts Sheaffer, Eagle...Yul Brynner, The King and I, deserves "Best Performance of Year" insists Morehouse, WT&S...Vivian Blaine, Guys and Dolls, should have won a "Tony" award, complains Coleman, Mirror.

COLUMN TIPS...G-men are going to show folks' hangouts to check on narcotic sales, informs Walker...Dollar punchboard chances on Guys and Dolls being peddled in restaurants, reports Wilson...Josh Logan split with Rodgers-Hammerstein because of differences over South Pacific road company, whispers Sobol...Call Me Madam chorines complaining about dressing room conditions, repeats Kilgallen...Winchell receiving complaints that Olivia De Havilland's Romeo and Juliet speeches were difficult to hear in the balcony.

WHITE LIES...Major weakness of Broadway children is that they will double any figure in which they are involved, Bolton, Morning Telegraph, surmises. They are pathetic, but not evil; touching, but not harmful.

TALENT PREDICTIONS...Metropolitan Opera basso Cesare Siepi will star in a Broadway musical, foresees Quick...TV should take advantage of bright new musical scores of The King and I, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Flahooley, and Make A Wish in planning TV musical production routines, suggests Billboard.

HOW TO GET TICKETS...Simple way to get tickets to smash hit early in run outlined by Durling, Journal American. Study out-of-town reviews in Billboard and Variety, the critics of which are very astute, down to earth and practical. When you note they like a show, write to the producer naming date you want to see show and the prices. When he answers, send your check. If this doesn't work, send name of producer to Durling who will find out why.

SHUBERT RECORD STRAIGHT...MBS Rudy Vallee apologized for "ill-advised or improper remarks" made against Lee and J.J.Shubert in a May 1950 broadcast. After reviewing this broadcast, Vallee stated that he feels his statements were unfair and did the Shuberts an injustice.

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' Theatre News Round Up '  
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"Theatrical Scrapbook" program on WNEW Sunday at 9:35 PM will feature theatre anecdotes, records, interviews and "New Face of the Week"...Bill Leonard, Chicago Journal of Commerce critic, switches to Chicago Tribune as feature writer...Broadway columnists rode elephants at opening night of Circus for benefit of NY Heart Fund...Three Wishes for Janie producer Al Lewis may invite NY critics to see Los Angeles opening July 2, Morehouse, WT&S, hears...Jose Ferrer dropped director post for "ANTA Album"...Sidney Kingsley received Award of Merit Medal for Drama from American Academy of Arts and Letters.



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' Interview Hi-Lights '  
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REGINALD OWEN...Affairs of State actor is becoming an established author, Fields, Mirror, reports. His first novel written with Paul Lees was "Soochow the Marine". The second novel, written by himself, is entitled "Morning Star". Because there is nothing to show when a play is finished, he turned to writing. When you write something good, it is there in the printed word, blazing and maybe permanent.

BETTE GRAYSON...Night Music lead is responsible for the Equity Library production being brought downtown to ANTA Playhouse, Rice, Post, discovered. The wife of author Clifford Odets had invited Donald Ogden Stewart to see the uptown production. Producer Robert Whitehead went instead. He liked the entire production so much he brought it downtown. Rice finds the young actress quiet, soft spoken and ambitious in a soft womanly fashion.

FRANK FARRELL...World Telegram and Sun columnist was shadowed about town for a full week by WCBS Bill Leonard and his wire recorder. Result was series of five broadcasts on the life of a typical gossip columnist. Leonard discovered that Farrell spends little time in his office during a typical 20 hour day. Actually his headquarters is the Hotel Whalen bar where he stops for a bite and meets his column contacts. From there it is a hectic, continuing, but always interesting round of the nightclubs and theatres.

F. HUGH HERBERT...The Moon Is Blue author doesn't agree that his small cast show was a cheap one to produce, he told WOR Barbara Welles. Actually the Stewart Chaney sets are very expensive, and make up any cost that might have been saved. Diana Herbert, his daughter is understudy for Barbara Bel Geddes. Herbert claims she is the only actress who can read a line six different ways, and make each one sound right.

HUGH WAKEFIELD...Springtime For Henry featured player revealed his role as an English gentleman farmer on MBS Sardis. In connection with his farm he runs a stable of race horses. The actor admitted it was very hard to run such an enterprise under socialism.

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' Theatre Arts on Current Plays '  
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The Rose Tattoo-Martin Beck, 2/5/51. Except for several good performances, Theatre Arts critic could find little to praise in Tennessee Williams' new play. The overall effect of the script is ruined by his addiction to high-falutin' language and feeble, muddled symbolism. While Daniel Mann's direction never seems able to distinguish between dramatic and merely theatrical effect. Sets by Boris Aronson are gorgeous and overwhelming.

Billy Budd-Biltmore, 2/12/51. Chalk up one more "con" review for the controversial adaptation of Herman Melville's novel by Coxé and Chapman. Magazine critic felt principal defect is simple that the moral and intellectual content of the novel is reduced to sketchiness by the stage. The sense of tragedy is lost because the authors have presented it in a dramatic vacuum. Acting was praised, together with sets by Paul Morrison.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Theatre Club, Inc. chose The Country Girl as best play of the season...Nancy Kelly, Season in the Sun picked as "actress with most attractive hairdo" by International Beauty Show...Doubleday's New York book ads plugged Billy Budd...Theatrical school seeking \$5,000 from investor KK215 Times...Seattle Times rationing theatre advertising...April 18 preview of A Tree Grows In Brooklyn will aid ANTA.

